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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TBILISI 000979

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [GG](#)

SUBJECT: GEORGIA: PATRIARCHATE BACKTRACKS - VIOLENCE ERUPTS

REF: TBILISI 972

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: A group of about 500 protesters picketed the Mayor's office on May 28 from about noon until 3pm. The rally with about 1000-2000 protesters reconvened for a concert in front of Parliament later that evening. Violence erupted around 9pm local time when protesters allegedly attacked a plain clothes policeman. Other plain clothes police appeared on the scene and were also attacked. In sum, 14 people were injured, 8 of whom were policemen. Two policemen were seriously wounded, underwent surgery, and remain hospitalized. Six policemen sustained minor injuries and were released. No information was available on the 6 protesters who were injured. Earlier, the Patriarchate backtracked from the Patriarch's comments of May 26 which were widely perceived as a show of support for President Saakashvili. The Patriarch's secretary read a statement saying that the Patriarch's May 26 statement should not be viewed as only supportive of the GoG. The statement called upon the GoG to diffuse the situation by calling for early elections, dialogue, or other means. Non-parliamentary opposition leaders pounced upon the statement while the GoG said its position on early elections remained unchanged. MoIA sources had earlier indicated to Poloff on May 26, that some sort of walkback was not out of the questions due to hard-line anti-Saakashvili members in the Patriarchate who would be displeased with the original statement. Meanwhile, contacts between Irakli Alasania and the GoG continue while David Usupashvili reported that he was currently at an impasse in discussions. Non-parliamentary leaders have not announced further plans. End Summary.

12. (C) Comment: The statement issued from the Patriarchate certainly confused the overall situation and is unlikely to help bring stability and calm among the parties. The sum total of both remarks is likely negligible as supporters on both sides will read into the somewhat vague and contradictory statements whatever they choose. We view it as more likely than not the statement, which was not read by the Patriarch, was a result of internal political battles within the Patriarchate rather than a show of support for the non-parliamentary opposition. Nevertheless, the "clarification" will undoubtedly bolster the non-parliamentary opposition at least temporarily. Ominously, evidence is growing (acknowledged by some leaders themselves) that the non-parliamentary leaders only nominally control their crowds. Having raised expectations that Saakashvili would resign within a week of protests; after 7 weeks on the streets, a frustrated, hard-core group of protesters and leaders appear to favor much more radical actions and possibly even violence to achieve their goals. End Comment.

Protests Small but Turn Violent

13. (C) A small group of about 400-500 protesters led by Nino Burjanadze (Democratic Movement - United Georgia), Salome Zourabichvili (Georgia's Way), David Gamkrelidze (Alliance - New Rights), and Eka Beselia (United Georgia)

picketed the Mayor's office. The group stayed in front of the Mayor's office for about 3 hours with leaders denouncing the "totalitarian regime", and protesters throwing eggs at the building. About 7pm a group of 1000-2000 protesters convened in front of Parliament for a rally/concert. MoIA reported that a number of scuffles broke out among protesters. At some point, a plain-clothes policeman who was filming the rally was attacked, dragged into a side-street beaten and stabbed. Other policemen came to his aid and when the incident was over 14 people were apparently wounded. Six policemen were released with minor injuries and two were seriously wounded and remain hospitalized. No information is known on the status of the six injured protesters (some non-parliamentary opposition members claim ten were injured). (Embassy Note: Information as to the event itself is unclear as is what exactly sparked the confrontation. End Note.) The non-parliamentary opposition claimed repression with Zourabichvili announcing that the "government went savage." Thus far, no non-parliamentary opposition has publicly addressed the behavior of their supporters. The MoIA has detained two individuals as a result of the incident.

The Patriarch Giveth - Then Taketh Away

14. (C) After the Patriarch gave a statement widely viewed as pro-GoG during his May 26 sermon, the Patriarchate issued a clarification on May 28. The written statement that was read by a church official said in part that the May 26 statement "was made with the purpose of diffusing a difficult situation." It continued that "(i)t does not mean that the problem is over. The situation remains serious and explosive. We think that the authorities should take

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effective steps to deuse tension either through early elections, negotiations, or other means." The non-parliamentary opposition viewed the statement as a great victory saying it meant the Patriarch supported new presidential elections. The GoG which had remained mum on the Patriarch's May 26 statement simply reiterated its commitment to dialogue while ruling out pre-term presidential or parliamentary elections. MoIA contacts had indicated to Poloff as early as May 26 that they were surprised by such a strong statement by the Patriarch, and that anti-Saakashvili, anti-Western hard-liners in the Patriarchate were already working to issue some sort of counter-statement. The same contacts said in their view the recent statement represented an internal church struggle coupled with a desire to be seen as neutral rather than support for the non-parliamentary opposition. (Embassy Note: Georgian Embassy employees seem to believe the Patriarch's initial statement during his service carries more weight among the public than the written statement issued on May 28. End Comment.)

Usupashvili Warns of Radicalism - Explains Paralysis

15. (C) Republican Party leader David Usupashvili met with the DCM to discuss the current state of affairs in the non-parliamentary opposition. He described the decision making mechanism as exhausting with Burjanadze leading the call for more radical actions. Usupashvili told the DCM he feared what Burjanadze's ultimate intentions were. Usupashvili said his role (with some others) was to try to moderate the radicals to avoid violence or even create the potential for violence. Usupashvili described the meetings as a constant fight among the groups with a version of the status quo generally prevailing. He admitted that as time passed and more moderate actions did not achieve results, the radicals were gaining the upper hand. Usupashvili told the DCM that they were losing control of an increasingly radical crowd. He said the decision was made to block railroad tracks because the crowd was ready for violence on May 26. Usupashvili said he called Speaker Bakradze to explain the situation and urged Bakradze to allow them to simply "blow off some steam" and not respond. Usupashvili said the

non-parliamentary opposition never discussed any overall strategic plans, simply the day's tactics. He indicated that a major reason the National Forum left the group was because its leaders were tired over arguing with Burjanadze, Beselia, Zourabichvili and other radicals over tactics. Usupashvili said that the National Forum's departure and Alasania distancing himself from the group had strengthened the hard liners.

¶6. (C) Usupashvili seemed unclear himself as to what to do next. He said Alasania was speaking with Bakradze but was not privy as to exactly what was occurring with his so called political ally. Usupashvili indicated that Alasania was naive to think that Saakashvili would not try to destroy him if he left the non-parliamentary group. He added that if Alasania ran for Tbilisi mayor, the non-parliamentary opposition would run multiple candidates to try to ensure he never got the position. Usupashvili agreed that his natural position was not among the radicals but rather with Alasania in moderate opposition. Despite this acknowledgment, he said he had little choice other than to ride the situation out. Usupashvili said increasing radicalism among the group meant a crossroads could come quickly. As far as GoG dialogue, Usupashvili last discussed specifics with Bakradze before May QUsupashvili last discussed specifics with Bakradze before May ¶26. Usupashvili said parliamentary elections within the year was the minimum demand in which he could break and begin negotiations. Bakradze indicated that the GoG would not discuss the issue within the next 6 months and was only offering dialogue with a possibility of early parliamentary elections in the future. Usupashvili said Gachechiladze and others were boxed into a similar holding pattern. He explained that the protesters would not be satisfied with anything less than new parliamentary elections and would likely be disappointed at that. (Embassy Comment: Usupashvili is probably correct; however, he did not care to discuss his and the other non-parliamentary opposition's own role in raising said expectations to unrealistic heights. End Comment.) Apart from the decision making process which tends to maintain the status quo, Usupashvili said many simply wanted to keep the protests going for fear of MoIA reprisals if they stopped. Usupashvili appeared tired, dispirited, and philosophic, tending to portray himself as an unfortunate victim of circumstance. He indicated that he was still ready to pursue dialogue but that talks between him and Bakradze were at an impasse.

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